

# Oregon Train Depot and Museum

## Preceding and building current building

Before rail-road service, land mobility was limited to walking, horseback, horse and buggy, and boating. Communities were eager to encourage railroads to pass through their communities. Many, including Oregon, voted to supply money to rail-roads. Rail-road served Oregon 32 years before first pneumatic tired automobile passed through Oregon. This was era when most houses in Oregon had a horse barn.

1892, Ogle County was served by 7 rail-roads and had 28 depots, 13 of which had water-towers (for steam engines). At many of these depots towns arose, with main street ending at depot. These towns prospered, having stores, medical doctor, post office and grain elevator. In each community. depot was center of activity. Railway passenger service kept horse and buggy cabs busy.



Oregon's wood frame depot (right) built 1893, burned 1913. Frank Lowden was on board of directors of rail-road that passed thru Oregon, C. B. & Q.; he wanted outstanding depot for his town (he owned residence Sinnissippi Farm, south-east of Oregon). His influence effected, Instead of typical small wood depot, building (left) with exterior of Spanish tile roof and brick and stucco panels and with interior walls of enamel brick wainscot with upper sections plastered, floors of ter-



razzo, and ceiling plastered and paneled with oak beam effect. Cost was approximately \$18,000. News-paper [name, date ?] head-line read "Station at Oregon--Built at a Cost Close to \$20,000 and People Are Justly Proud of it--- Burlington Ry. Co. Has Done Well By Us in the past year." Also, Lowden used his private Pullman car at siding near Depot to deliver speeches and, on occasion, would eat Sunday dinners in Pullman dining car attached.



shows freight house and train entering or leaving depot

## Saving and restoring building

Mayor James Barnes and others saved Oregon's depot from demolition; then councilman Bob Rees started huge task of restoring building: he established board of directors, located many volunteers, and solicited funds. When I first became involved at Oregon's depot, I had no idea of time and effort needed to save it. Following people and organizations helped save Depot and obtained title to its property: Dave Smith (City Attorney), Ogle County Historical Society, Oregon Public Library, Myron Olson (Illinois State Representative), Harlan Rigney (Illinois State Senator), Oregon Chamber of Commerce, Harriet Lowden Madlener, Illinois Commerce Commission and Warren Miller. Mayor Barnes sent and received numerous letters promoting this project. David Smith received several letters; we have on file 40 letters he sent from 1986 thru 1992. Myron Olson sent to B.N.S.F. letter expressing his support for rail-road museum, in which he wrote that he took train from Oregon to quad cities and back.

During this 7 year process several problems were addressed:

- B.N.S.F. wanted to demolish building.
- Other towns receiving depots had reneged on their agreements with B.N.S.F..
- Oregon's Depot was too close to tracks, so it would need to be moved, or track removed.
- Oregon could obtain Depot if an 8 foot chain link fence were erected 3 feet from building on all sides. Oregon wanted more land area than 3 feet peripheral to building.
- Water-line running thru Depot supplying house across street needed to be addressed; problems with ownership of house.
- Deed was missing.
- Oregon wanted land to west of Depot, for rail-road park.
- Negotiations were ongoing to vacate rail-road spur running north along river.



street side

Dave Smith cautioned Oregon to temper requests, so negotiations could continue. Even though this process required much time, Mayor Barnes, Dave Smith, and others persisted. Eventually, virtue prevailed. After reading all correspondence involving saving Depot, I understand that without Mayor Barnes Depot site would be empty lot, with little historic value.

When people visit us from other towns, such as Dixon, Polo, Mt. Morris, Byron, etc., they often mention that depot in their towns had been razed.

## Rail-road agents at Oregon's depot

Oregon Depot was a busy place, with three ticket agents working an 8 hour shift each day.

From Insights [what ?, date ?] :

Rupert Sharick worked for rail-roads 60 years, 7 days per week, with pay about \$35 per week, as Oregon's agent and telegraph operator.



Rupert recalled that some trains (with steam powered locomotives) that stopped in Oregon could not climb hill by Silica Plant (west of Oregon). They would go as far as they could, but if they slipped, they were forced to reverse to Honey Creek (east of Oregon) and then try again. Oregon had a dinky (little) steam locomotive (like left). It would assist by pushing needy trains up that hill and made clickity-click and roar.

Every train would stop at Oregon to load water from water tanks (picture, upper right) at each platform. Dinky would clear snow off tracks from Oregon to Forrester. First diesel-electric train was "Zephyr", which ran from Minneapolis to Chicago.

Rupert remembers an occurrence concerning Governor Lowden and his daughters, Mrs. Madlener and Mrs. Philip Miller, when Lowden was running for Illinois governor. He had elephant and his private Pullman car moved by rail to Oregon's Sauer's garage, on Washington near bridge, to engage in political rally.

Rupert received and recorded election results, then sent them to Ogle County court-house, where interested people waited to learn. (Sometimes national election results were not received for several days after election.). Many stories about depot and Rupert at depot.

Rail-road had man stationed at each crossing and bridge where pedestrians might cross; Rupert's son Horace was stationed at Quaker Oats crossing (2nd at Collins).

Horace graduated from Nash School, after spending twelve years of schooling in only that building. He went to Coliseum for gym class and to Fair-grounds for football, for which gym members dressed at Coliseum, then ran to fair-grounds for practice, then ran back to Coliseum. Nash School did not have special classes, like agriculture or industrial arts. He started working for Burlington Northern Railroad and, later, for 37 years, as U.S. Postal Service rural mail carrier. He said that during 1930's U.S. depression, factories Kables and Etnyre ensured that none of their employees and many others didn't starve to death. He said he thought Oregon did not have relief services that other towns had. He also mentioned, as positive influences for him, Dr. Warmolts, Jiggs Burright and Mrs. Kloster.

Rupert Sharick served railroad for 60 years, with fifty of these at Oregon Depot. Rupert seemed to know everyone and everyone seemed to know him. Everyone who wrote their memories of depot mentioned Rupert. Bob Etnyre mentioned that he were always welcomed by ticket master Rupert Sharick: "The story of Oregon Depot is the story of Rupert Sharick, and vice versa. In fact I believe that Rupert might have been born with train tickets in his hand. No nicer a man has ever lived and he loved to have kids in his station. As we disembarked from train, Rupert was always there to greet us with a cheery smile and a big hello that (Yes: We were Truly Home)."



Rupert Sharick was what we call today a multi tasker. He sold tickets, sold railroad insurance, received and sent Western Union messages, typed train orders received on teletype, handed train orders using a train order pole to conductors as the trains passed and checked each train that passed to see if any of the wheel gear boxes were overheating. Depot was communication center of Oregon. Western Union messages were sent and received,

During war if he received a Western Union death notification of one of our soldiers he would first send a messenger to minister's home advising him that he was sending notification to soldier's home so he could be there when message arrived.

Everyone in our area knew ticket agent he sold tickets, sent and received Western Union messages, stood on train platform as each train passed checking for smoke coming from wheel bearing, and received and delivered train orders.

Telegraph operator at train Depot received and sent Western Union messages, which served as main communications to outside Oregon, until long distance telephone service. When war casualty message was re-



Ticket window was restored by Mervil Wood and Howard Fox. For 40 years Rupert Roy Sharick worked in this office. When you look into office thru ticket window you will see our version of Rupert standing behind counter.

Beginning 1836, same year Oregon was founded, Samuel Morse, Joseph Henry and Alfred Vail developed an electrical telegraph system. Morse invented system of key presses that came to be known as Morse Code, by



left: A typical "straight key", This U.S. model, known as the J-38, was manufactured in huge quantities during World War II, and remains in widespread use today. In a straight key, the signal is "on" when the knob is pressed, and "off" when it is released. Length and timing of the dots and dashes are entirely controlled by the telegraphist.  
(text and picture from *Wikipedia*)

representing each character of alphabet and other characters as a set of short presses, graphic as ".", verbalized as "dit" and long, graphic as "--", verbalized as "dah". An important application is signaling for help using SOS: "...---..."; orally this is "dit dit dit, dah dah dah, dit dit dit".

Morse Code is of three or 4 types: American, or railroad (original), Gerke (German eisen-bahn), International, which I used in U.S.A. Army, and ITU (current). They are similar, but some letters are different. I listened and sent Morse Code at Fort Knox, Kentucky eight hours a day for 12 weeks. I and my cohorts were willing learners, because they told us that if we failed or fell behind, we would be sent to infantry. Needless to say we helped each other in barracks each night, and we all passed, sending and receiving 32 words a minute. (It's amazing what you can learn if you are motivated).

Telegraph operators, to send messages, first converted them to Morse Code. Then operators pressed key of a simple device, closing brass contacts, ("pounding brass") which sent an electrical signal, which was first carried by copper wire (later, starting 1890, also by radio). At receiving end signals were converted to series of clicks, which were converted by operators to written, or by machines to typed, messages. Messages could be sent in either direction.



ceived, depot operator Horace Sharick would notify minister before delivering message to family. When Oregon had local telephone service, people without home telephone service could use pay telephone at Depot.



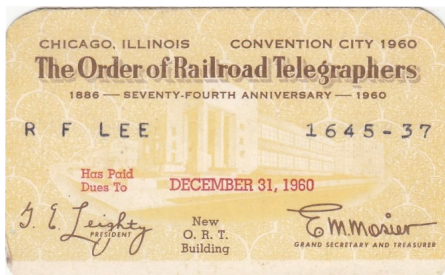
Ticket office contains original desk, pull-out telephone, telegraph key and receiver, teletype machine, message hoop, telephone switch board, and practice mail sorting box.



Harold also mentioned that at times



Oregon Depot was overflowing with students taking trains to college or returning home, especially at Christmas time.



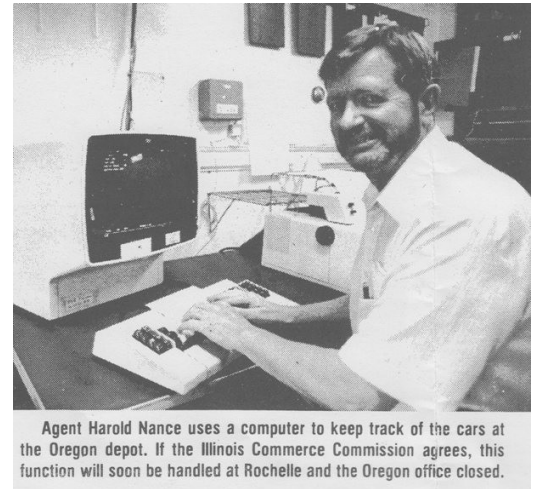
Richard F. Lee succeeded R. Sharick as Oregon Depot agent



Russ Hansen

One of his stories concerned an unhappy customer. Harold said he always told nonpassengers not to board Zephyrs, because they loaded passengers quickly as possible and speed away. Above mentioned nonpassenger [who ?] boarded train with his wife, and train starting leaving while he was on board. He jumped while train was moving and entered Depot with nasty mood.

At Oregon Depot, telegraph was used for train messages, setting station clock to railroad time and sending and receiving Western Union messages. Roy Sharick, Dick Lee, Harold Nance and Russ Hansen worked as station agents in Oregon. Dick Lee, who formerly worked as telegrapher at Oregon and Chana, learned Morse Code at Gale Institute, Minneapolis. Harold Nance presently lives in Oregon, and Russ Hansen in Rockford. At Oregon depot are telegraph key and receiving machine. We also have desk they worked at, with scissor pull-out telephone and typewriter.



Agent Harold Nance uses a computer to keep track of the cars at the Oregon depot. If the Illinois Commerce Commission agrees, this function will soon be handled at Rochelle and the Oregon office closed.

Other stuff in Oregon's depot

With Oregon being Ogle County seat, many local drafted young men boarded a train at Oregon Depot to serve their country.

Military room contains names and pictures of Ogle County U.S. military veterans. Bonnie Hendrickson has spent much time and effort recording men and women from Ogle County who have served in our ten major wars. She has searched several sources, including newspapers and archives. Three ring notebooks list veterans from each war. Army, Air Force, Coast Guard, Marine and Navy flags are displayed. In same section we have *War Records of Mount Morris*, by Harvey Kable, and *Hometown Heroes of the Forrestville Valley Area*, by Kathy Vasch.



In freight room is wood-coffin-carrying-container, contributed by Mark Tremble. It was used to ship coffins from company in Iowa to funeral homes. My father's remains from Mayo Clinic came in coffin box similar to this. Cost of shipping human remains was two and one-half times cost of first class ticket.



for controlling train motions

Also in freight room is central traffic control panel used by Burlington Railroad, with which operator in Aurora controlled train movements and siding switches from Aurora to Savanna, Illinois.

When passenger trains were approaching Oregon, person on watch in hotel's cupola signaled drivers of horse-drawn taxis to go to Depot. Bob and Delores Massey donated hall-tree-clothes-rack that was once located at Sinnissippi Hotel.



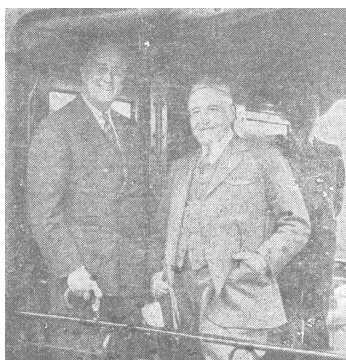
Displayed is wonderful model of Oregon Depot, constructed by Emory Craig; all bricks are hand carved. Also, in his yard are unique bird houses, mail boxes, water wheel, etc. He worked for Delaware Lackawanna and Western Railroad, between Buffalo and Hoboken, New York; age 17 he worked as "Gandy dancer".



Displayed is George Mortimer Pullman's traveling trunk, donated to us by Melody Welty.



One of my favorite displays is Western Union message from Governor of New York Franklin D. Roosevelt, while campaigning for U.S. President, to Rupert Sharick. Roosevelt's train was scheduled to stop in Oregon so that he with Governor Lowden could deliver speeches. Rupert sent Roosevelt telegram asking if Rupert's two sons could ride in his car from Savanna to Oregon. Roosevelt replied by Western Union message from Saint Paul Minnesota, April 19, 1932 to Chester and Horace Sharick: "Will be delighted to have your boys with us on our train from Savanna to Oregon — Franklin D. Roosevelt."



Franklin D. Roosevelt and Frank Lowden, at Oregon

July, 1932, Governor (of New York) Franklin Roosevelt gave a campaign speech for president of United States from back of his private car at Oregon Depot. His friend Frank Lowden was Governor of Illinois and a Republican, while Roosevelt was a Democrat.

When Oregon's station agent, R. L. Sharick, was notified in advance of this visit, he sent Roosevelt a Western Union message asking if his two sons, Chester and Horace, could ride with Roosevelt in his private car from Savanna to Oregon.



Franklin D. Roosevelt gave talk at Oregon from platform of his private car.

Roosevelt's reply, April 19, 1932, to Chester and Horace Sharick was sent from Saint Paul or Minneapolis. "Will be delighted to have your boys with on our train from Savanna to Oregon." A copy of this Western Union message is at Depot.

July, 1932, at Chicago Stadium, Roosevelt received nomination of Democratic candidate for President.

July 6, 1932, a letter from Executive Mansion at Albany, New York was received at Oregon's Depot:

Dear Mr. Sharick:

I have been much heartened and pleased by your message of congratulations.

I feel most confident that the principles of our platform will bring success at the polls to our national ticket. I hope that I may count on your help and that of your friends.

Very sincerely yours,  
Franklin D. Roosevelt

November 3, 1932, another letter was sent:

Mr. R. L. Sharick,  
C. B. & Q. Railroad Co.,  
Oregon, Illinois

My dear Mr. Sharick:

Just as I am about to start off on another campaign trip I must take a moment to make acknowledgment of your friendly letter. I assure you that I have time for all the Sharick Family and also that when you and your sons, Chester and Horace, call at the White House it will be a pleasure to shake hands with you.

No promises have been made about appointments of any kind. We must win the election first. After that, if you wish to write me you are at liberty to do so.

I am sorry to hear that the large campaign buttons did not reach you: I know they were ordered sent. However, I know Chester and Horace have been doing effective work with the small buttons they are wearing.

With grateful appreciation of your loyalty and enthusiasm of the entire Sharick family, and with all good wishes.

Yours very sincerely,  
Franklin D. Roosevelt

Nov. 8, 1932, Roosevelt was elected President.

A photograph in Oregon Newspaper [name, date ?] shows Roosevelt during above-mentioned visit addressing crowd with Lowden standing at his side. From this, Chloe Gale created an oil painting, which she donated to Depot. She started seriously painting during her senior year at Oregon High School; Chloe's mother mentioned her art teacher, Cheryl Bunton, as her mentor. Chloe was, at time of this writing, attending Augustana College .

### Activities at Oregon's depot

Incoming and outgoing freight kept agents busy in freight house Also, Oregon's depot was communication center of Oregon. Before

telephones, mail was received and sent by rail.

Eventually mail was sorted in mail car. We have at Oregon Depot a compartmental practice mail sorting box. A mail-person practiced sorting mail in a sorting box and needed to pass a test before he was allowed to sort mail in a mail-car.

Our local farmers used rail-road to ship grain, cattle and chickens to Chicago. At Oregon Train Depot Museum are two wooden pens used to ship chickens. At depot was stock-yard. Bob Greenhagen explained that cattle were purchased west and shipped on train to Oregon; rail-road men hated cattle. Dairy farmers shipped milk to Chicago. Toss Heuerman, who grew up on 1st, recalled seeing farmers drive cattle across Rock River bridge and then past his house to depot stock-yards. Bob Etnyre recalled his trips home from college and from service in WWII,

"when we left Rochelle we were almost home, and when clicking of wheels changed to a dull roar as we passed over bridge, then we were home". Incoming and outgoing freight kept agents busy in freight house. They even received and shipped cattle from Oregon Depot. Yes, we even had a small stock yard and it was said agents hated this part of their job. Rail-road depot was center of activity in each community; rail-way passenger service kept horse-and-buggy cabs busy.



Allen Gale, Tom Gale, Nancy Gale, Chloe Gale, Lisa Gale, Neil Holland



at Oregon Depot

Listed in Oregon's telephone directories are names of several men who worked on section crews and several working as station-agents and at adjacent freight depot.

Special trains were furnished for events such as Ogle County Fair and political rallies.

At one time seven passenger trains each day stopped at Oregon's Depot, and daily passenger service ran between Chicago and Minneapolis/St. Paul. Servicemen departed and arrived by train, and at Christmas many college students did also. Several horse and buggy hacks and cabs provided service to and from Depot. Burlington ran five passenger trains each way between Chicago and Twin Cities, four of them in daytime. Stream-lined trains stopped only at larger depot locations. From Oregon a person could leave early in morning, be in Chicago by 9:15 AM, conduct business, get back on a train, stop only in Aurora, and be back in Oregon in time for supper.

Many service-persons passed thru Depot. 1971, passenger service ceased; closest passenger service now is Amtrack at Princeton. Of Ogle County's former 28 depots, only Oregon's remains.